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Shaggy or Shaved? The Symbolism of Hair among Persian Qalandar Sufis*

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Abstract

The Qalandars have usually been considered antinomian Sufis, a view that may have been perpetuated by their shocking appearance (the shaving of head-hair, eyebrows, moustache and beard, that is, the so-called “four-shaves”, *chahār-ẓarb*, which runs against the normative Islamic tradition. This paper briefly highlights the significance of hair in the Islamic tradition with reference to the sacred sources (the Qur’ān, *Ḥadīth* and biographies of the Prophet). Subsequently the general Sufi perspective on hair is considered, and then the study focuses on the Qalandars. Following a brief investigation of the term, four seemingly different Qalandar explanations for the origins of the *chahār-ẓarb* are presented. Despite the apparent dissimilarity in these emic sources, it is argued that they hold significant parallels. An understanding of the contents of these stories reveals the Qalandars to be located firmly within a normative Sufi tradition; rather than having an unbounded, intoxicated and antinomian lifestyle, these stories suggest that the Qalandars were deeply attached to Qur’ānic and Islamic referents, and wished to uphold an ethic by which they were able to devote their focus on the divine.

Keywords

Qalandars, Hair in Islamic Traditions, Sufism, *Futuwwat*

INTRODUCTION

The believers of many of the major religious traditions are frequently identified simply through the way their hair has been groomed, cut, shaved, coloured, or left untouched. For example, the Jewish male often

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has distinctive ringlets, the Hindu ascetic sports long matted hair, the Christian monk boasts a tonsure, the Buddhist monk is completely shaven, and the Sikh has his hair collected beneath a turban. Hair is a distinguishing feature, a marker of difference over a whole range of classifying features, such as belief, practice, social status, age, gender and ethnicity. Even in the contemporary, secular West, when religion plays a less prominent role in society than in the pre-modern period, hair remains an important symbol of social aspirations. Social comments with hair have been made by hippies with long unkempt hair in the 1960s, by Afro-Caribbeans with big afro-style hair in the 1970s, and by punk-rockers with their Mohicans in the late 1970s. The symbolic significance of hair is manifested in the present age within many societies (on the recent "Modesty and the Veil Festival" in Iran, promoting suitable hairstyles for males, see *The Times*, July 6, 2010: 31).

Hair is a topic rich with potential for interesting research, and many of the well-known, contemporary ethnographic studies have tended to focus on Asian traditions (Leach 1958; Hershman 1974; Obeyesekere 1981; Hildebeitel/Miller 1998). In Islamic traditions, hair has not attracted much scholarly attention (exceptions include Pfluger-Schindlbeck 2006; Delaney 1994), although an associated topic, the *ḥijāb*, is one of the most controversial and sometimes acrimonious discussions in the contemporary period. While interest has surrounded the issue of female sexuality and hair (and purity) in the modern era (Marcus 1992), it was male hair that resulted in some debate in the mediaeval period, within Sufi circles at least. This was because a group of Sufis engaged in a ritual of shaving the hair of the head, eyebrows, beard and moustache, the so-called "four shaves" (*chahār-zarb*), which made them instantly recognisable in society and set them apart from other Muslims. These individuals were known as *Qalandars*, a term that emerged as a literary trope in the 10th-11th A.D. (de Bruijn 1992: 75-86).

QUR'ĀN, ḤADĪTH AND SĪRA

The Qur'ān does not offer specific instructions to Muslims about how believers should grow or cut their hair. There are references to shaving the head at the end of the *ḥajj* pilgrimage at Mecca (2.196; 48.27), but it is in the *Ḥadīth* and *Sīra* literature that issues related to hair are considered in more detail. (The veracity of these reports is not of concern here, since most Muslims in the mediaeval period when the *Qalandars* appeared would have assessed these reports using their own methods to verify their historical authenticity). That Muḥammad was a model for believers meant that his conduct and his presentation provided the

ideal to emulate. The *Sīra* includes passages in which Muḥammad is described as having hair that was neither “too curly nor lank, but definitely curly” (Ibn Hishām 1955: 725-726), and tradition held that “the plaits of his hair were parted” (Schimmel 1985: 34). Moreover, *Ḥadīths* confirm that he was meticulous in grooming his hair (Bukhari 1986: 7.745), and he is reported to have said: “He who has hair should honour it” (Abu Dawud). Muḥammad also gave recommendations for cutting and clipping head hair, the moustache and beard before a period of forty nights had elapsed (Abu Dawud; Muttaqun). There are indications that Muḥammad was aware of the symbolic significance that hair could have. The simple principle of belonging, of insider and outsider, is apparent in several anecdotes. For example, it is said that the Jews and Christians used to let their hair fall down while the heathens parted it, and Muḥammad followed the ways of the People of the Book on matters upon which he had no specific instructions from God. So he used to let his hair fall down without parting it, but subsequently he did part it (probably in the Medinan period when relations between Muslims and the People of the Book were less than harmonious) (Muir 1861: 331; Ibn Taymiyya 1991: 413, 416, 420-421). In addition, it is reported that Muḥammad used to clip his moustache, and a Magian came to him and said: “You ought to clip your beard and allow your moustaches to grow”, but Muḥammad replied: “My Lord commands me to clip the moustaches and allow the beard to grow” (Muir 1861: 332). The significance of all of these reports is simply that Muḥammad enjoined on Muslims to pay suitable attention to their hair, ensuring that it was clean, orderly, and of a relatively short length. In addition, moustaches and beards were to be grown, but facial hair was to be kept neat and tidy. This was the model, or pattern for believers to emulate.

More than this, there are indications that the early Muslims believed that Muḥammad’s head hair possessed *baraka*, or a form of holy power. There are traditions that relate how his hair was carefully collected after it was cut or shaved and used as an amulet (Zwemer 1948: 50). Moreover, it is also related that “When the Prophet had his beard shaven and his companions surrounded him, they never suffered a single hair to fall to the ground but seized them as good omens or for a blessing. And since his Excellency had his hair cut only at the time of pilgrimage, this had become *sunna*” (Zwemer, *ibid*). The traditional association of hair with power may be linked to the custom of cutting the new-born’s first hair (*‘aqīqa*), and this may be connected with both the idea of controlling and sharing this power. The *‘aqīqa* ritual involved the weighing of the cut hair and the equivalent weight (in silver or gold)

was donated in alms, and a sheep was also sacrificed and the meat donated to the needy (Juynboll/Pedersen 1960: 337; Ibn Rushd 2006: 560-2; Schimmel 1994: 181).

The Qur'ān has very little to say about hair, although Schimmel notes that there is a mention of the forelock in 96.15-16, and, indeed, the portrayal of the forelock (*nāṣiyya*) is negative, suggesting that it held a power that required some control: "And yet, indeed, if he does not desist. We shall drag him by the forelock. By the lying, the sinful forelock".¹ Schimmel (1994: 181) adds that in the Islamic tradition, grasping someone by the forelock was "to hold his most power-laden part, that is, to overcome him completely". The power of hair may have something to do with the realisation that hair is a liminal material, that is to say, it is dead and has no sensation, yet it is somehow powerful enough to grow, one of the indications of life.²

Interpreting the power of hair has resulted in different perspectives, ranging from linkages with the holy (as in the *baraka* associated with Muḥammad's hair) to something more base and animalistic. Schimmel (ibid.: 94) argued that it is due to the hair's power that Muslim men are not supposed to enter a sacred place with the head uncovered. Thus, a fez, turban or cap is worn with a small prayer cap underneath. On the other hand, a possible conceptual link between hair and that of animals (and irrational, non-human behaviour) is evident in early Islamic texts, such as the report of Wahn b. Munabbih (d. 114) who narrated the travels of Dhu al-Qarnayn to the mythical creatures of Gog and Magog, which among other animalistic features (claws and big sharp teeth) were hairy. Their big hairy ears were used as clothes, and males and females would "have sex whenever they met, like beasts" (Wheeler 2002: 234).

It is evident that the symbolism of hair in the Islamicate traditions contains a wealth of meanings, and this essay focuses solely on one aspect, namely the Qalandar perspective. However, to fully appreciate the significance of hair within the Qalandar world view, it is necessary to investigate very briefly the general Sufi position.

THE SUFI PERSPECTIVE

The Sufi tradition of the mediaeval period contains much material relating to hair, but it seems that the Sufis grew their beards and mous-

¹ The forelock is also mentioned in 11.56.

² On the symbolic value of the forelock in the Yezidi ritual, see Asatrian 1999-2000: 85ff.

taches, and cut their hair at regular intervals. That the celebrated Persian mystic Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1274) sported hair, moustache and beard, is supported in an anecdote contained in Aflākī's hagiography of the great poet, in which he instructs the barber to cut his facial hair in such a way that only enough remained to tell the difference between a man and woman. Interestingly Aflākī continued:

Another day he [Rūmī] said, "I am jealous of the qalandars because they have no beard". And he recited the following tradition: It is a man's good fortune if he has a thin beard because the beard is an adornment for a man and if it is large he becomes conceited, and that is a form of perdition.

And he said: "An abundant beard is pleasing to the Sufis, but by the time a Sufi has combed out his beard, a knower of God had already reached God (Aflākī 2002: 284).

Rūmī's warnings about nurturing pride by paying attention to facial hair are reflected in a number of other cases.³ For example, the celebrated Sufi, Abū Ḥafṣ 'Umar Suhrawardī (d. 1234), instructed trainees in the Sufi-futuwwat associations that mushroomed in Persian and Turkish speaking lands between the 13th-16th centuries A.D.,⁴ not to fiddle with their moustaches or beards when in the presence of their master, yet the trainee should possess at all times a comb so that he may groom his moustache and beard (Ṣarrāf 1991: 145, 162). Some of these Sufi-futuwwat associations restricted entry to those whose appearance conformed to the ideal male image. For example, a Persian futuwwat-nāma states:

There are other people too for whom futuwwat is impermissible because they have no beard. This is because the Prophet said: "No futuwwat, no man". First, [God] gave futuwwat to Adam. When the Truth brought Adam and Eve from the hiding of non-existence to existence there was no beard on his face, and they say that Eve did not respect him, nor was she afraid. Adam complained, "Oh God! Eve does not respect me". God Most High granted

³ See also the story in 'Aṭṭār's *Maṭīq al-Ṭayr* about the old man who loved his beard very much, but did not enjoy spiritual ecstasy. He asked Moses the reason for this, and the Prophet was told by God that the old man had not attained a high level of spiritual insight because of the attention he paid to his beard. On hearing this, the old man started to tear out his beard, but Gabriel indicated to Moses that this reaction was just as bad, because it indicated that the old man was still thinking about his beard. The primary purpose of the spiritual life is God and not those things that orientate the individual towards the divine (Avery 1998: 265-266).

⁴ For these Sufi-futuwwat associations, see Ridgeon 2010: 61-91. Briefly, however, the Sufi-futuwwat organisations were urban groups of males who had their own forms of ritual initiation, clothing, and engaged in forms of Sufi activity, such as the *samā'* and *dhikr*. Such groups appear to have been focused on those who did not desire to engage in Sufi activity on a full-time basis.

Adam a beard, and when Eve saw Adam's blessed beard, fear and wonder fell into her heart, and after that without saying anything, she had such modesty before Adam that they say she never spoke a word to his face, and she never smiled in front of his beard (Afshārī/Madāyeni 2002: 90-91).

That Sufis were very conscious of hair may be linked to their perception of God in the mundane world, especially in beautiful faces.⁵ In Sufi Persian poetry, the face of the Beloved (God) was framed, hidden or highlighted by the locks or tresses. Such a focus is worthy of lengthy consideration, for if Islamicate traditions are weak in iconography or painting, it certainly compensates in its poetry. The amount of Sufi verse in both Arabic and Persian languages testify to a tradition, which spiritually visualised God in an anthropomorphic fashion. The trope of the flowing tresses of the Beloved was one of the most popular found in this tradition, perhaps because of the ambivalence or multivocality of its message. On the one hand the tress (*zulf*) of the Beloved brings raptures to the lover, and yet the same tress conceals His face.⁶ This is an example of the hide and seek played by lovers, but which was utilised by the Sufis to demonstrate the manifest and non-manifest dimension (or immanence and transcendence) of God. As Rūmī says: *When I passed beyond my intellect, I seized the end of His tresses/Now I am caught, captured by His curls* (Rūmī 1982, no. 14951); *The Banner of Thy tresses veils Thy Beauty/Otherwise Thy light would shine forth* (ibid., no. 21768).

These descriptions of the Beloved stand in contrast to the appearance of the Sufi, some of who appeared to have shaved their heads, as indicated by Kāshī (who lived in the 14th century) who commented that shaving the head (*ḥulq-e sar*) was the custom in Sufism but not in *fuṭuwat* (Ṣarrāf 1991: 15). A number of famous mediaeval Sufis, including Majd al-Dīn Baghdādī (d. 1209) and Yaḥyā bin Aḥmad Bākhārī (d. 1335-6), have left sufficient evidence in their writings to indicate that shaving the head in the wider Sufi tradition was not the exception (Afshārī, online).

⁵ The *shāhid* (or witness) is the individual who presents the lover with the proof of God's manifestation. The famous Sufi, Ibn 'Arabī (d. 1240), recollected his sentiments about the beautiful Iranian woman from Isfahan, Nizām, in his *Tarjumān al-ashwāq*: "Every time I mention a name it is her I am naming. Every time I refer to an abode it is her abode I am describing", and he adds: "in composing these verses my allusions throughout were to divine inspirations and spiritual revelations (Addas 1993: 209).

⁶ The *zulf* was utilised as a metaphor by poets writing in Persian at a very early stage in the history of Persian poetry. The *zulf* appears in the works of Rūdakī (d.c. 941), Anvarī (d. 1189), and Khāqānī (d. 1199), and it was also adopted by Sufi poets, such as Sanā'ī (d. 1131) and Rūmī, (Dehkhodā 1994: 11357-60).

THE QALANDARS

Although the practice of shaving the head seems to have been a common practice among the Sufis, the Qalandars took the shaving of hair to an extreme, as their custom of the *chahār-zarb* gave them a distinctive appearance. Whereas the shaved head of the Sufi was no doubt concealed by a turban or head covering,⁷ the Qalandar was readily identified as he would have had no beard, moustache or eyebrows. The unusual appearance of the Qalandars must have seemed appropriate for individuals whose image in Persian literature from the 10th century onwards was antinomian and non-conformist. The term *Qalandar* was used by Persian poets as a trope to refer to a dissolute and destitute individual who cared little for social etiquette or the laws of the *Sharīʿa* (Ewing 1997: 230–52).⁸

The following quatrain is one of the first uses of the term, and it comes from the middle of the 12th century when Ibn Munawwar wrote a biography of Abū Saʿīd ibn abi'l Khayr (967–1049)—thus, it is possible that the term was in currency as early as the 10th century:

*I had tuppence, but was one penny short,
Two pitchers of wine I bought, a trifle short.
On my lute the high string, but the low strings are gone,
So don't tell me of the qalandar's woes.*⁹

Aḥmad Ghazālī (d. 1126) offered more on the person who became known as a Qalandar, and linked this clearly with recognisable Sufi terminology.

⁷ Many Iranians associate Qalandars with Rūmī's story in the *Mathnawī* about a parrot and a bald dervish. In this story, the parrot's head feathers had fallen out following an altercation with its owner, and the bird subsequently refused to speak until it saw a dervish in a woollen garment with a bald (or shaved?) head. However, there is no evidence in the text that Rūmī's intention was to portray a Qalandar dervish (Rūmī 1925–40: I. 347–361).

⁸ A recent study has offered two possibilities for the origin of the term *Qalandar*, and both express the idea that it was a location rather than a person (Shafīʿī-Kadkanī 2007: 37–49). The first is that the word is derived from *Kā-langar*, which means a place, such as a lodge or a *khānaqāh*. The second is that the word comes from *kālan-jar*, meaning the black fort in Hindi because the word appeared in Persian for the first time when Maḥmūd of Ghaza was attacking India in the early 11th century. The first usages of the word indicate that Qalandar was a place where the marginalised, the roughs and outcasts congregated, and those who frequented the Qalandar were termed *Qalandarī*. Soon these terms were adopted by some Sufis and men of letters to designate a place where spiritual truths were discovered

⁹ Slightly adapted translation from O'Kane 1992: 153.

*This is the lane of blame, the field of annihilation;
 This is the street where gamblers bet everything in one go.
 The courage of a qalandar, clothed in rags is needed
 To pass through in bold and fearless manner (de Bruijn 1997: 74)*

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī (d. 1131) cited approvingly a quatrain of Yūsuf ‘Amarī:

*In the alley of taverns [there is no difference between] dervish and shah.
 In the path of unity [there is no difference between] obedience and sin.
 Before the Throne [of God, there is no difference between] the sun and moon.
 [And there is no difference if] a qalandar’s cheek is black or white (‘Ayn al-
 Quḍāt 1994: 228).*

Similar ideas of wine-drinking individuals frequenting disreputable places and engaging in illicit practices were expressed by Sanā’ī (d. 1131), and included references to spiritual leaders of the Qalandar rite, a *mī’rāj* into the heavens and drinking in taverns. Verses, such as those cited and other references are best understood as “originally daring imagery, derived perhaps from secular poetry, [which developed] into items of a set of symbolic allegories” (de Bruijn 1992: 75-86). But it was in the 13th century that the Qalandar movement seems to have emerged as a social phenomenon, and gave expression to the idea of life copying art (or literature).

The appearance of the Qalandars at this historical juncture may well be related to the increasing appeal of Sufism among the masses, and the acceptance by leading Sufis of the participation by the general public in certain Sufi ritual, permitting them some dispensations or relaxation of the Sufis’ normally exacting rules and requirements. It was perhaps in conjunction with this that structured Sufi brotherhoods began to emerge in the 12th century, a feature of which was a degree of order, formalisation and centralisation.¹⁰ It is possible, therefore, that the very early Qalandar movement was an attempt to revive a rigorous and ascetic spiritual lifestyle, as opposed to the perceived weakened, yet centralised and rigid Sufi life.¹¹ The origins of the movement lie with two individuals, native to Iran, Quṭb al-Dīn Ḥaydar (d.c. 1200) and Jamāl al-Dīn Sāwī (d.c. 1232/3). The information that has been passed down about these two Qalandars should be treated with a degree of caution

¹⁰ One of the great proponents of this kind of Sufism was Shaykh Abū Ḥaṣṣ ‘Umar Suhrawardī, and it is not surprising that he was a vehement opponent of the Qalandar movement (see Karamustafa 2006: 34).

¹¹ See the introduction to the *futuwwat-nāma* of Shaykh Abū Ḥaṣṣ ‘Umar Suhrawardī (Ridgeon 2011; Karamustafa 2006: 25-38).

because the sources were written at least a century after the end of their lives.¹²

From its origins in the mediaeval period groups of Qalandars spread across Islamic lands, and diversity of ritual related to the *chahār-ẓarb* appeared among the various denominations of Qalandars.¹³ Qalandars were known under different names, including *Abdāls*, *Jāmīs*, *Shams-i Tab-rīzīs* and *Bektāshīs* in Ottoman territories, the *Jawālaqīyya* and *Ḥaydarīyya* in Persian speaking lands, the *Jalālīyya* and *Madārīyya* in India, and the Naqshbandī Qalandars who seem to have existed in Central Asia.¹⁴ By the late mediaeval period and into the 17th and 18th centuries, the Qalandars continued to be associated with an antinomian life-style, which did not conform to the *Sharī'a*. One Russian subject visiting Isfahan during the mid-17th century testified to the “deviancy” of Qalandar life: “[The Qalandars] went barefoot and naked, wearing only a sheepskin with the fur outwards flung over their shoulders. On their heads they put hideous caps, in their hands they carried sticks and spears and axes, and in their ears they stuck big crystal stones. Their appearance was terrible, as though mad and evil. By day they would walk around the Maydān-i Shāh and bazaar, and would eat and drink little, at night they would drink wine and fornicate” (apud Keyvani 1982: 54).¹⁵

QALANDAR EXPLANATIONS FOR THE ORIGIN OF SHAVING

In this section four different versions for the origin of the shave will be presented. The first is based on the accounts related to the two individuals (Quṭb al-Dīn Ḥaydar and Jamāl al-Dīn Sāwī) who are associated with the first appearance of the Qalandars in the mediaeval period. This is then followed by other Qalandar—or Qalandar inspired—accounts, which I have ordered on the basis of the chronology of individuals mentioned in the texts (Adam, Muḥammad, and Ḥusayn), rather than the age of the texts themselves.

¹² Information on Quṭb al-Dīn Ḥaydar is found in *Khayr al-majālis*, which was compiled after 1353, while the details of Jamāl al-Dīn Sāwī are in a versified Persian biography of him by Khaṭīb Fārisī (born 1297-8), (Karamustafa 2006: 39-49).

¹³ The literature in English on the Qalandars is very limited. Among works that are worth investigating are Digby 1984: 87-98; Jarring 1987; Karamustafa 2006; in Persian, see Zarrīnkūb 1990: 359-379; Shaḥīdī-Kadkanī 2007.

¹⁴ For these groups, see Mīr'ābedīnī/Afshārī 1995: 54-63; cf. also Karamustafa 2006: 70-78.

¹⁵ Cited in Keyvani 1982: 54.

I. Quṭb al-Dīn Ḥaydar and Jamāl al-Dīn Sāwī

Quṭb al-Dīn Ḥaydar seems to have spent all of his life around the region of Zawa in Khurasan. The story of his life is simple: it consists of him ascending a mountain as a youth, and never completely returning to everyday existence. He agreed to see his parents provided that they moved to the foot of the mountain, but otherwise his existence was one of seclusion. In these circumstances he was free to distance himself from the dictates of the *Sharī'a*, and the sources describe how he used only leaves to cover his body and would eat what nature provided for him. The association with leaves perhaps suggested to authors at a later stage that it was Quṭb al-Dīn who was responsible for discovering how to use cannabis leaves as an intoxicant, which was a practice that came to be associated with Qalandars (Karamustafa 2006: 44-46).¹⁶ He was also known for his ascetic practices, which were designed to control his carnal soul (*nafs*), and his followers subsequently designed various iron implements, which performed this function, both physically and symbolically. Such iron implements included collars, bracelets, belts, and rings—some of which were placed around the genitals.¹⁷ Another feature of this early Qalandar ascetic was a prototype of the *chahār-ẓarb*, which involved the burning or scorching of the beard, but leaving the moustache to grow (Shafīʿī-Kadkanī 2007: 225).¹⁸ This practice reflected that of the pre-Islamic Zoroastrians and contrasted with the model provided by Muḥammad, according to the *ḥadīth* cited previously (Muir 1861: 332). It can only be speculated that Quṭb al-Dīn Ḥaydar's practice was a specific challenge to a tradition, which he felt had become petrified, and had lost its original spiritual content.

Jamāl al-Dīn Sāwī appears to have been a bookish person as a young man, but he adopted the practice of travelling, which was not that unusual in Sufi circles. However, in Damascus he came across an ascetic who was naked except for a covering of leaves, and was sitting motionless on a grave. Jamāl al-Dīn Sāwī was to follow this example, which to him was a manifestation of the Sufi axiom "die before you die".¹⁹ To

¹⁶ One of the first to associate Quṭb al-Dīn Ḥaydar with *hashish* was the Egyptian scholar Maqrīzī (d. 1442), (Shafīʿī-Kadkanī 2007: 222).

¹⁷ It does not appear that Quṭb al-Dīn Ḥaydar had been celibate all of his life as he is known to have had a wife and children (Shafīʿī-Kadkanī 2007: 218). For the use of iron bracelets, necklaces and other implements, see *ibid*: 220.

¹⁸ There were a number of Qalandar groups in the Ottoman Empire, the individuals of which let their moustaches grow (Karamustafa 2007: 65-84).

¹⁹ This is a *ḥadīth* that was commonly cited by Sufis. It is contained in Forūzānfar 1955: no. 352.

these practices, he added his own of the “four shaves” (the eyebrows, head, moustache and beard) and the four *takbīrs* (a verbal utterance of “Praise be to God”), which is usually said when someone dies. Despite his attempts to live a reclusive life, Jamāl al-Dīn soon became surrounded by a small clique of followers, and this social interaction may have forced him to moderate his behaviour somewhat, so that he began to wear a coarse sack-cloth garment, and allowed his followers to eat the food donated by others.²⁰ But these are also the essential features of later Qalandar lifestyles: seclusion, renunciation, travelling and rejection of society. This kind of lifestyle may have been directed at negating the value of existing forms of worship and Islam or at least those, which appeared stagnant and spiritually redundant. Another interesting aspect about Jamāl al-Dīn Sāwī concerns two possible origins for the *chahār-ẓarb*.²¹ The first, summarised above, simply describes how Jamāl al-Dīn came under the influence of an ascetic called Jalāl Darguzīnī, and as a result, Jamāl al-Dīn Sāwī shaved his face and beard and began to sit motionless in graveyards, facing Mecca, with no food. The second tradition relates how Jamāl al-Dīn Sāwī was constantly bothered by a certain woman who had fallen in love with him. Having being tricked into the woman’s house, he managed to escape by shaving off his head hair, moustache, beard and eye-brows.²² Subsequently Jamāl al-Dīn Sāwī adopted a life of asceticism (Ibn Baṭṭūṭa 1993: 38).

The shock-factor of these kinds of hairless individuals must have been considerable in the mediaeval Middle East when the normative

²⁰ For more details of the main disciples of Jamāl al-Dīn Sāwī, see Shafīʿī-Kadkanī 2007: 236–262.

²¹ One influence on the origin of the “four shaves” may be found in the Buddhist tradition. Buddhist monks shave their heads to manifest their celibate status (although contemporary Zen monks in Japan may marry). Nevertheless, it appears that there were many Buddhist centres in around Central Asia and parts of Eastern Iran in the 13th century. It has been claimed that “Iran must have been full of Buddhist temples—we hear of them only when they were destroyed in 1295–96” (Bausani 1968: 541). It is not possible within the confines of this article to develop this argument further.

²² The shaving of the eye-brows is particularly interesting, if only for the similarity of the Persian word for eyebrow (*abrū*) with the word *abrū* meaning honour, which—due to a secondary folk etymological reference—is perceived as composed of *āb* (water) and *rū* (face). (As kindly pointed to me by Prof. G. Asatrian, *āb*- in this compound means rather “splendour”, being just a homonym of *āb* “water”). It is speculative, but perhaps the connection between the Qalandar (who made no claim of upholding the honour, *abrū*, and reputation of normative Islam, and who shaved off his eyebrows, *abrū*) was made by villagers who witnessed the Qalandars pass by on their wandering through the regions of Iran and beyond.

style was to emulate the Prophet Muhammad. Their appearance must have caused a mix of wonder, astonishment, fear and outright antipathy, and Julia Kristeva's observation about the abject being edged with the sublime could not be more apposite (Kristeva 1982: 11). The Qalandar rejection of conventional norms and their supposed association with the roughs, hoodlums and their tolerance of "non-Islamic" behaviour cast them as the abject members of society who could instil horror and fear into the hearts of those who beheld them.²³

II. Adam's Close Shave

There is evidence that the Qalandars and those within the *futuwwat* tradition (mentioned above) linked the shaving of the head with the Prophet Adam. In particular, one Qalandar text states that the shave took place after Adam repented, having been thrown out of heaven and landing on a mountain in Sri Lanka (Mīr'ābedīnī/Afshārī 1995: 161, 169-170). He was, of course, remorseful for disobeying God's command, which in the Qur'ān is an order not to eat of the tree (2.34). As a result of eating from the tree he becomes aware of his sexuality: "When they tasted of the tree, their private parts became visible to them, and they started to cover themselves with the leaves of Paradise" (7.20). The connection between the nakedness, sexuality, repentance and the shave is sufficiently clear not to require further elaboration.

Another Adam story, which appears in two *futuwwat* treatises, is suggestive of such a linkage.²⁴ (Although the basic story is the same, there are very important differences, which are highlighted in the footnotes). According to this myth, when Adam was in heaven he had no hair on him (*mū bar andām nadāsht*).²⁵ After he ate the wheat²⁶ he was cast out of heaven and came to a mountain in Sri Lanka. After some time God accepted the repentance of Adam "the chosen one" (*Ādam-i ṣaḥīḥ*)²⁷ but he commanded Gabriel to tell Adam that he must not disobey His com-

²³ 'Aṭṭār's story of the Arab being "accosted" by Qalandar dervishes is a good example of how the Qalandars were used as a literary trope to express such fascination (see Avery 1998: 307-309).

²⁴ The first of these appears in Afshārī 2003: 73-88. The second is in Afshārī/Madāyeni 2002: 241-245.

²⁵ This important sentence appears only in Afshārī 2003: 81.

²⁶ The Qur'ān speaks of Adam eating from the tree, and the Islamic Persian tradition describes how he ate of wheat (*gandum*).

²⁷ An honorific name given to Adam. Many of the Prophets were given honorific names, such as Muḥammad, the beloved of God (*ḥabīb Allāh*). This sentence only appears in Afshārī/Madāyeni 2002: 242.

mand again. On seeing Gabriel, Adam was informed that Eve was in Mecca, so the Prophet set off to be reunited with her. Eve did not recognise Adam because of the incredibly long hair that had grown from him, and exclaimed “This is not my Adam! Adam was a hairless person (*ṣāfi*),²⁸ but this Adam has hair on him!” (Afshārī 2003: 81). His hair had grown to about seventy metres (*haftād gaz*) in length and his beard was forty metres (Afshārī/Madāyinī 2002: 242). Adam lamented and said: “Oh God! She does not accept me”. Finally Gabriel came to shave Adam’s head.²⁹

III. Emulating Muḥammad

Qalandar treatises (such as chapter two of the Qalandar text included in the appendix of this article) and those in the *futuwwat* tradition of the barbers often cite the Qur’ānic verse 48.27: *God has fulfilled His prophet’s vision in truth. You shall enter the sacred mosque, if God wishes, in security, your heads shaved and your hair cut short, without fear.* This verse was supposedly revealed after the Battle of Uhud and Muḥammad was in a position to safely perform the *ḥajj* to the Ka’ba, which included the ritual shaving and cutting short of the hair. This Qur’ānic citation and origin is elaborated within a Qalandar treatise from the Safavid period in which Gabriel is instructed by God to shave Muḥammad’s head.³⁰ The treatise states that the Prophet’s hairs were so valuable that God forgave a thousand sinners with each of them. Moreover, when Gabriel had finished shaving and cutting short the Prophet’s hair, Muḥammad’s companions remarked that not a single hair had fallen to the floor. Gabriel explained that the Prophet had 30,332 head hairs; 30 had fallen to the ground, and he had left them there. The rest he had given to the angels and the *houris*; 10,000 of the hairs were for Muḥammad and his children; the angels had taken the rest to heaven so that the Carriers of the Throne³¹ and the Angels in Proximity³² could make scent from it.

²⁸ The word *ṣāf* (here in the form of *ṣāfi*) literally means “pure, smooth, clear”.

²⁹ The *Ḥadīth* literature tells a different story. Ubayy Ka’b (a companion of the Prophet) reports Muḥammad saying that before he sinned, Adam had “a lot of hair on his head like the top of a palm tree” (Wheeler 2002: 25). Tabarī states: “When Adam fell he brushed his head on heaven and thus became bald, and passed on baldness to his children” (ibid: 27).

³⁰ This treatise is found in Mīr’ābedīnī/Afshārī 1995: 79-213. The particular passage is found on pages 144-145.

³¹ These are mentioned in the Qur’ān, 40.7.

³² *Al-muqarrabūn*, a Qur’ānic term, see, for example, 83.21, 83.28.

God took pity on them through the blessing (*baraka*) of Muḥammad's hair, which the angels kissed and rubbed on their eyes and cheeks.³³

IV. In Remembrance of Ḥusayn

Yet another explanation for the origin of the shave is contained in another Qalandar treatise in which the purpose appears simply as an attempt to link the origins of the shave with the Shī'ite version of Islam (Afshārī 2003: 90-94).³⁴ The following is a translation from the beginning of the treatise:

Know that the place was Karbala where Imām Ḥusyan—peace be upon him—and a group of Shī'ites and lovers were captured by Yazid, curses upon him. It was the tenth day of the month of 'Ashūrā, and all the lovers sat before His Excellency, Imām Ḥusyan, who was in deep thought. Suddenly Imām Ḥusayn raised his head and said: "Friends! It is blessed (*mubārak*)". They replied: "Oh Imām! What is blessed?" And Imām Ḥusayn said: "The rank of martyrdom (*daraja-yi shahādat*), for tomorrow will be our final day". So, seventy-two people said: "Oh Imām Ḥusyan! There are many foreigners and hypocrites, but we number just a few. We desire that they recognise us tomorrow among all the dead, and they distinguish a client (*mawālī*) from a foreigner". So, therefore, those among the foremost of those seventy-two shaved their heads (*tarāsh kardand*), and this has been the reason for shaving ...

But if someone has the "four shaves" (*chahār-ẓarb*), it is necessary that he yields absolute annihilation, and leaves behind all worldly attachments and becomes a solitary and single lover in the path of love, and he must obliterate these human acts, names and habits, and the invitation of *die before you die* is given to him in order that he reaches the station of the *abdāl* ...³⁵

³³ A very similar storey is related in a *futuwwat-nāma* for barbers (dated at 1890), which is collected in a bunch of treatises outlining the customs and beliefs of Khāk-sār dervishes (who are supposed to have inherited many Qalandar beliefs) (see Afshārī 2003: 81-82).

³⁴ Although the treatise is anonymous and does not mention the word Qalandar, it discusses Qalandar symbolism, such as the *chahār-ẓarb*, the implements for shaving, and specific items of clothing, leaving little doubt that it was composed by a Qalandar dervish.

³⁵ It is unclear whether *abdāl* refers to a specific rank of dervish among the Qalandars, or whether this refers to the generally recognised Sufi understanding of a group of individuals known as *abdāl* (substitutes) who were a part of a spiritual hierarchy of "saints" who always existed in the world and as one passed away another took his place.

They often ask the wayfarer: "What is the meaning of the four shaves?" Say: "The meaning of shaving the beard is that we do not bow down to anything other than the Truth and Reality, and we put aside the adornments of the world. And the meaning of shaving the moustache is that we do not instigate our lips to lie, back-bite, slander or annoy people. The meaning of shaving the head is that we make a stand and put ourselves in the station of non-existence. And the meaning of shaving the eyebrow is that we leave behind duality, and we see and know everything as one".

The editor of the text believes that it was probably written during the Safavid period between the 16th-18th centuries. The Safavids transformed the denominational map of Iran (which at the time was still a majority Sunni area) by making Shī'ism the official creed of the state. In addition, the Safavid monarchs, despite their own emergence from a Sufi-esque movement, quickly realised that in order to rule Iran it was necessary to promote a more rational and less emotional or ecstatic spirituality, which stood in contrast to the Sufi movement. As a result, the Safavids adopted various policies that aimed to belittle the role and influence of Sufism, particularly the more established and sedentary Sufi orders (Arjomand 1981; Ridgeon 2010: 123-65). The Qalandars, although clearly of a Sufi nature, were not geographically located in a specific area, which had a certain affiliation to a tomb of their founder, and so it seems that they were able to avoid the Sufi persecution of the Safavid state. It may also be the case that the Shī'ism of the Qalandars, epitomised in the quote above, permitted them to operate more comfortably in Iran than other orders, which were of a Sunni origin. Therefore, the symbolism of the *chahār-ẓarb* developed in new ways; it gave denominational security to the Qalandars, and it also retained its tendency to signify the ethical high ground and renunciation.

COMMENTARY ON THE FOUR EMIC SOURCES

The symbolism of hair has been the source of much controversy among anthropologists. One of the most important theories was that of Edmund Leach whose investigation of the Indian tradition of ascetics led him to accept the argument that the head is a symbol for the phallus and the hair represents semen. He argued that "An astonishingly high proportion of the ethnographic evidence fits the following pattern in a quite obvious way. In ritual situations: long hair = unrestrained sexuality; close shaven head = celibacy" (Leach 1958: 154). A third category, matted hair, which is grown without concern "means total detachment from the sexual passions" (ibid: 156). Leach's connection between head

hair and sexuality has been accepted by a number of leading anthropologists, including Obeyesekere (1981); others, however, most notably Hallpike (1969: 256-64), reject the subconscious relationship between the head = phallus, hair = semen, hair cutting = castration, and long hair = unrestrained sexuality, short hair = restricted sexuality, and close shaven hair = celibacy (ibid.: 257). Instead Hallpike argued that long hair is symbolic of being outside of society (witches, intellectuals, and hippies), and cutting (and by extension shaving) symbolises re-entering society, or living under a particular disciplinary regime within society (soldiers a hair convicts) (ibid.: 261).

In many Islamic contexts it would appear that for males hair on the head or the face is symbolically connected to sexuality. Moussa (1988: 254), notes that: "The respect with which the moustache is regarded seems to be common among the people of the Middle East whatever their ethnic or religious origin may be. It is a social custom, associated with the belief that the moustache is a symbol of virility and masculinity, in societies where the male reigns supreme. Among many people of the Middle East, it is a grave matter to swear by one's moustache. It is like testifying under oath in the Western world".³⁶

The connection between sexuality and hair in some of the Qalandar "myths" relating to the origins of the *chahār-zarb* is not difficult to identify. This is particularly the case with the story of Jamāl al-Dīn Sāwī, whose original act (if the source is to be believed) seems to have been an individual, psychological response to personal anguish. Subsequent Qalandars formed small groups or communities, and, therefore, the *chahār-zarb* also served as an identity marker, or a communicative symbol. Thus, the primary significance of the *chahār-zarb* may not necessarily have been related to the psychological state of the actor, that is to say, it may not always have symbolised the desire to remain chaste, but it reflected an amalgamation of other attributes and associations, such as extreme asceticism and the rejection of the more ossified forms of Islamic spirituality. It is important to note that much of the Qalandar literature does not discuss celibacy in a detailed fashion, but merely mentions the requirement to abandon lust and sexual gratification.³⁷ The absence of thorough discussions on celibacy does not mean that Qalandars

³⁶ The contemporary significance of the moustache in Turkey is contained in Yumul 1999.

³⁷ A good example of this is the rejection of sexual gratification in the first Qalandar treatise included in Mīr'ābedīnī/Afshārī 1995: 134, in which there is a list of ten stations in the *ṭarīqat* for the Gnostics. The sixth station is abandoning pleasure and lust (*tark-i lidhat wa shahvat kardan*).

enjoyed free licence to engage in sexual acts. The use of iron implements around the genitals of Ḥaydarī Qalandars, in addition to the general lifestyle of poverty, mendicancy and otherworldliness, militated against marriage and sexual relations.³⁸

That the *chahār-zarb* was in some way connected with celibacy may be argued with reference to the idea that the Qalandar lived the spiritual ideal contained within the *ḥadīth* cited previously, *Die before you die*. In effect, the Qalandar in shaving his head, performed a ritual of spiritual re-birth, and became once more as innocent as a child before his father (God). Children, of course, are chaste, have no facial hair and usually have very little head-hair. As adult/children, dead/alive, the Qalandar occupied a very unusual space; however, this state resembles the liminal status that was discussed by Victor Turner as a circumstance that is betwixt and between, located somehow in the middle of sacred and profane dimensions (Turner 1972: 93-111).³⁹ Turner also observed that in a liminal state, “neophytes are likened to or treated as embryos, newborn infants or sucklings by symbolic means, which varies from culture to culture” (ibid.: 96). Liminality also involves a degree of structural “invisibility” as the neophyte falls between two distinct structures, in which it may be possible for the subject to be physically invisible (ibid.: 95). Indeed, the Qalandars were associated with an itinerant lifestyle,⁴⁰ and this too contributed to their invisibility, as did the shaving of the head, which made the Qalandar anonymous to outsiders (just as the huge piles of corpses from Nazi concentration camps lacked elements of individuality, which had been shaved away with their hair). Yet invisibility, anonymity, selflessness are the kind of spiritual attributes to which the ideal Sufi and Qalandar aspired. The adult/child, alive/dead, visible/invisible, secular/profane Qalandar in the liminal state was

³⁸ It is worth noting Karamustafa’s observation that the detractors of the Qalandars accused them of sodomy and zoophilia. While he disregards much of this kind of criticism, Karamustafa considers the possibility of Qalandars observing celibacy, which did not exclude unproductive forms of sexual activity (see Karamustafa 2006: 20-21).

³⁹ Although Turner’s work was specifically orientated to rites of passage in which the subject moved from one state, to a second state (the liminal) and then moved back and was reintegrated into society, the Qalandars never completed the final stage of re-integration. They lived permanently in the liminal stage.

⁴⁰ Travelling in search of knowledge was also a general recommendation within the wider Sufi tradition (see, for example, Hujwiri 1911: 345-347). The Qalandars must also have remained sedentary for periods, as there is much evidence of Qalandar lodges (*langar* and *takiya*) (Shafī’ī-Kadkanī 2007: 260-262, 278-279; Ridgeon 2010: 138-139; Kiyānī 1990: 248-249).

clearly a potentially dangerous subject, and herein provides yet another reason for the shaved head: a symbolic marker for separating himself from society's norms and orientating himself towards the divine within a new social community of Qalandars.

Sexuality is also apparent in the Adam story. While the brief story may merely be a very simple play on the similarity of the Persian words "the chosen one" (*ṣaḡfī*) and "hairless" (*ṣāfī*), it is also possible that Qalandars understood that Adam's disobedience and subsequent realisation of his nakedness were somehow represented by his long hair, which necessitated its shaving. With his hair shaved and beard trimmed Eve recognised Adam, and his repentance was finally complete. It is also significant that the treatise states that Adam had no hair in heaven, that is, he was childlike, innocent and unaware of sexuality. His disobedience in eating from the tree symbolised his coming of age and the awareness of sexuality. It was, of course, the disobedience that caused Adam's difficulty, because on earth he did not remain ignorant of his sexuality, rather, he fathered several children. The shave, however, was a symbolic reminder of his primordial nature that did not involve the knowledge of sexuality, which for some Sufis created an obstacle for paying complete and utter attention to God.⁴¹

Sexuality is also present within the Muḥammadan myth of the origin of the *chahār-ẓarb*. Although this message in the Muḥammadan story appears as a simple justification of the shave to emulate the Prophet's practice, the Qalandars would also have been aware of the larger context of the Qur'ān (verse 48.27) and Islamic tradition, which connects the shave to the *ḥajj* and its rituals including specific rulings about sexual activity. The tradition of shaving at the pilgrimage seems to be linked to sexuality, for Muslims refrain from sexual activity during the period of the *ḥajj* when men let their head hair and beards grow. Grooming the hair would imply that the object of their thoughts was not solely directed to God. It is after the performance of the *ḥajj* rituals

⁴¹ For the sake of presenting a comprehensive survey of the Adam stories, it should be noted that in the same *futuwwat* treatise that describes Adam as having no hair in heaven, another origin for the shave is presented, though it does not seem to hold any explicit relation to sexuality. In this myth, Adam was very tall, which conforms to the *ḥadīth* portrayal of Adam (Wheeler 2002: 31), and the heat of the sun caused him some discomfort. As a result, God commanded Gabriel to brush Adam's head with his wing. The spot where Gabriel's feathers touched Adam's head made the latter bald. However, Adam wondered whether there was something wrong with him, since one part of his head had hair and another part was bald. Gabriel confirmed there was nothing the matter, but he shaved Adam's head so that it would feel the same all around (Afshārī/Madāyenī 2002: 243).

that men may cut their hair and shave, and this represents a return to sexuality, or at least the conventions and laws associated with controlled Islamic sexual practice (Delaney 1994: 167). The Qalandars adopted the shave as a practice that was not specific to the *ḥajj*, but was relevant at all times, that is to say, it represented the interior, or *bāṭin*, message of the Prophet. Although the texts do not say so, it may be speculated that this shave was symbolic of a kind of “greater *jihād*”. Indeed, the connection is not as speculative as may be assumed, as the greater *jihād ḥadīth* was uttered after the Battle of Uhud (when verse 48.27 was revealed).

Verse 48.27, which serves as a “myth” in which the sacred nature of Muḥammad’s hair is discussed, is used to justify the Qalandar tradition, and as mentioned above, it appears in a number of *futuwwat-nāmas* for barbers. The significance of this requires some explanation, especially as the majority of *futuwwat-nāmas* (or those works, which are contained in the genre of “occupational treatises”) that were composed in Persian contain details related to the barbers’ trade. The relative abundance of such texts may be related to the Zoroastrian belief, which was widespread in pre-Islamic Iran that anything, such as hair, teeth or blood, which became detached from the body was impure. As a result, barbers were considered with some suspicion and their profession was regarded as contemptible (Delaney 1994: 73). It is worth speculating whether the legacy of this Zoroastrian belief resulted in the restrictions that were included in the *Futuwwat nāma-yi Nāsirī* (written in the late 13th century), which included a list of twelve trades, the members of which were prohibited from joining the *futuwwat* organisations (Golpenārli 1999: 162). One of these trades was that of the barber or masseur (*dallāk*). Although the Islamic aversion to nakedness may account for this prohibition, the Zoroastrian influence may well have contributed to the distaste among Muslims in the mediaeval period. What is indisputable, however, is the number of treatises dealing with aspects of the barbers’ trade, from shaving, to the utensils that were used (such as the razor, the whet-stone and the mirror).⁴² The prohibition of barbers joining *futuwwat* organisations may have resulted in the barbers composing their occupational literature in an attempt to legitimise the profession.

⁴² As Afshārī (2003: 73) notes: “It is worthy of attention that among the handwritten treatises that the followers of *futuwwat* have left—in particular the treatises from the Safavid period—more than any other trade, the barbers and bath-attendants are praised and honoured”. Afshārī edited six treatises related to the barber’s trade and included them in the work cited above.

The intriguing point to note is that there are many similarities between the literature of the Qalandars and the occupational literature of the barbers. Both display a particular interest in the ethic of *futuwwat*, include sections on shaving the head and its mythic origins, and discuss the tools of the barbers' trade. Given the suspicions surrounding the ritual impure profession of the barber on the one hand, and given that the Qalandars supposedly paid scant attention to such considerations, perhaps even desiring to court notoriety (especially through their shocking appearance), it is tempting to speculate a link between the two groups. Could it be the case that Qalandars may even have worked as barbers at times in the pre-modern period? The point that needs to be highlighted is that on the basis of such Qalandar-*futuwwat* literature, the explanation to legitimise shaving through Islamic referents, in particular the Qur'ān and Muḥammad is explicit. Implicit, however, is the connection of verse 48.27 with the *hajj* rituals and laws pertaining to permitted sexual activity. That the Qalandars lived in a permanent state of chastity located them symbolically at the Ka'ba, performing the *hajj*, in the presence of God.⁴³

Hair functioning as a symbol of sexuality, and the *chahār-ẓarb* representing a commitment of celibacy does not seem to work in all cases. This is nowhere more apparent than in the original myth that discusses the events at Karbala and the followers of Ḥusayn who wished to be identified with his cause. However, it is common that the meanings that individuals perceive in symbols change, indeed; they are frequently multivocal. Such new symbolic meaning of hair offered by the Qalandars is a good example of the "invention of tradition", to use a much used expression (Hobsbawm/Ranger 1983). Conspicuously absent from the Karbala origins of the *chahār-ẓarb* is anything that can be equated

⁴³ The importance of Islamic and Qur'ānic referents should not be underestimated in the highly ritualised Qalandar performance of the *chahār-ẓarb*. One Qalandar treatise gives a specific order to the shaves, which start with the head, and is performed with the recitation of *ḥadīth* and Qur'ānic verses (including 48.27). This is followed by the shaving of the beard, then the moustache and finally the eyebrows. The Qur'ānic verse to be recited when the eyebrows are shaved is 53.9: "Coming within two bows' length or closer", which is traditionally understood as a reference to Gabriel's descent before Muḥammad. That the eyebrows are shaped like two bows offered the Qalandars a symbolic reminder of the possibility of Gabriel descending before their own eyes to provide divine illumination. Moreover, once the ritual of the *chahār-ẓarb* was completed, associated rituals commenced, including offering praise for the Shī'ite Imāms and receiving certain garments, including a cloak (*kisvat*) and head covering (*tāj*). This Qalandar treatise is included in Shafī'i-Kadkanī 2007: 414-420.

with sexuality; however, this does not necessarily invalidate the anthropological theory that equates shaving with celibacy. The relationship of hair, celibacy and the Qalandars is wrapped up in the concept of the “condensed symbol”, which is a symbol that is “so powerful that it encapsulates all the diverse aspects of the symbolised” (Olivelle 1998: 40-41). That is to say, even though the Qalandar treatise may speak primarily of denominational origins, performing the *chahār-ẓarb* implicitly links the Qalandar to a life-style of asceticism; the terms used in the Karbala origins myth are non-existence, and forsaking the adornments of the world (including perhaps, women and young men). In addition, as mentioned above, the very lifestyle of the Qalandar (poverty and mendicancy) would have made difficult the normal sexual relationship between a man and wife. The ideal of celibacy was contained within the condensed symbol of the *chahār-ẓarb*. This theory works, according to Olivelle (ibid.: 37), through the theory of displacement, which “occurs when the unconscious substitutes the entity X for the entity Y, thus permitting individuals at the conscious level to speak about and to manipulate X, which at a deeper level are statements about and the manipulation of Y”. Thus, the hair displaces the penis as the locus of sexuality, just as the discussion of the events at Karbala displaces the ideal of celibacy. In this discussion of Karbala, the condensed symbolism of the shave includes familiar Sufi themes, such as the refusal to worship anything other than God; in other words the focus is on unity (*tawhīd*). Thus, the beard is considered an adornment (as described previously by Rūmī), which must be shaven so that the Qalandar may focus on unity. Likewise, it is necessary to remove the duality of the two eyebrows, so that the Qalandar may see and know one. This form of understanding that posits an ontological unity between God and the believer was problematic for many Shīʿite clerics, but it was relatively standard among Sufi circles.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have attempted to provide some coherence to four seemingly different emic discussions relating to the origins of the *chahār-ẓarb*. Three of the examples can be linked relatively easily to sexual themes, and seem to fit within the kind of arguments offered by psychologists and anthropologists, such as Leach. Yet the changing content of three of these narratives ensured that the message remained pertinent; the different stories relating to the *chahār-ẓarb* reflect the adage of “old wine in new bottles”. The fourth case in this paper is more problematic, and only if the theory of displacement is used can it be associated

with any theory about sexuality. The problem with the theory of displacement, however, is that it may be used to reduce any form of symbolism to over-arching psychological theory.⁴⁴

However, the theories of shaven hair = celibacy and shaven = social control do not contradict each other, especially when they are applied to the Qalandar. It should be noted firstly that concern with sexuality in the Sufi context should also be linked with a range of attributes that are also connected with sexuality. Rampant sexuality was obviously not encouraged by the Sufis, rather than “strutting around like a peacock”, the Sufi was encouraged to be humble and focus his energies on controlling the *nafs*. This meant that one-upmanship, the predominance of one male over another, the attempt to attract females by belittling the competition was something that would not have occurred to the genuine Sufi. Thus, the *chahār-zarb*, was symbolic of a denial of sexuality and a range of associated behavioural traits that were considered reprehensible. At the same time, the *chahār-zarb* was also symbolic of the Qalandar separating himself from what might be termed society, yet he still lived within a “particular disciplinary regime” (Hallpike 1969: 260), that is to say, the specific conventions of the Qalandar group, with all its inherited traditions and unique ritual performance.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that not all Qalandars performed the *chahār-zarb*. As early as the 15th century, there is a suggestion of this in the following verse by the celebrated Persian poet Ḥāfiz (n.d.: 348):

*Here are a thousand points finer than a hair,
Not everyone who shaves his head understands what it is to be a Qalandar.*⁴⁵

This verse does not allude to actual Qalandars with head-hair but rather Ḥāfiz argued that the spiritual dimension of being a Qalandar transcended the shaving of the head. The once antinomian Qalandars had lost their shock-factor, and a new form of antinomianism was necessary to convey the spiritual message. The literary trope of the Qalandar, as discussed in a previous section, depicted an individual who rose above hypocrisy and the ossified conventions of society and religion

⁴⁴ The hair/sexuality association has been questioned (Hallpike 1969). Hallpike rejected the subconscious relationship between the head = phallus, hair = semen, hair cutting = castration, and long hair = unrestrained sexuality, short hair = restricted sexuality, and close shaven hair = celibacy. Instead, he argued that long hair is symbolic of being outside of society (witches, intellectuals and hippies), and cutting (and by extension, shaving) symbolises re-entering society, or living under a particular disciplinary regime within society (soldiers, convicts, etc.) (ibid.: 261).

⁴⁵ This *ghazal* has been translated into English (Avery 2007: 232).

that distracted the individual from God. However, Ḥāfiz, like all great poets, was a step ahead of his time, and dared to think the unthought.

A Qalandar treatise entitled *Arbāb al-ṭarīq* ("Lords of the Way", which is the text in the Appendix) includes a chapter that illustrates that the *chahār-ẓarb* was not always a clear indication of being a Qalandar.⁴⁶ This text, composed in the 17th century during the reign of 'Abd al-'Azīz Khān in Bukhara (r. 1645-81),⁴⁷ states that even though Muḥammad grew his hair from his ears to his shoulder, there are some who shave their heads (that is, the experienced wayfarer, whereas the inexperienced let their hair grow). The author proceeds to explain that it is possible that an individual can be attracted or pulled towards God, to become enraptured and lose his free will, and in such a condition all concern for shaving his hair vanishes. In the terminology of the Sufis he is known as a *majdhūb*. Since the *majdhūb* is with God, the concern for symbolically presenting himself as celibate, as an ascetic, or as devoted to God, has no meaning. Such an individual inevitably ends up with entangled hair that is not controlled or groomed in any fashion.

The existence of long-haired lovers with ungroomed locks does not contradict the general perspective that considers that individuals of this group should refrain from sexual activity. Leach argued that long unkempt, ungroomed, matted hair is symbolic of a "total detachment" of sexual interest (Leach 1958: 156). And Olivelle was of the opinion that those who shaved their hair separated themselves from society since this act was symbolic of the denial of sexual maturity, and denial in an adult placed him outside social structures. He continued by claiming that leaving the hair uncontrolled is symbolic in a similar way. Thus, in some Asian societies, those involved in mourning rituals and menstruating women have long, unkempt hair, and distance themselves temporarily from society (Olivelle 1998: 39).⁴⁸ However, it seems from the Qalandar treatise *Arbāb al-ṭarīq* that the Qalandar was permanently separated from society, whether he shaved his head, involuntarily let his hair grow, or even if both took place. Thus, the ideal Qalandar, with

⁴⁶ This treatise must be accepted as a Qalandar text, as the author says that it is about Qalandarism and the rituals that are usually associated with the Qalandars. The edited Persian text appears in Afshārī 2003a: 155-159.

⁴⁷ For this ruler and his times, see R. McChesney in *Elr.*, vol. 5(1992): 188ff.

⁴⁸ It is interesting to note that in his ethnographic work on hair in the Punjab, Hershman offers the following categories for Hindu men: at the "profane" level, the Hindu male cuts his hair; at the "sacred" level, the Hindu male shaves his head; at the "divine" level the Hindu male has matted hair and becomes as God (Hershman 1974: 279).

shaggy hair or shaven head, lived a celibate life, separated from society in a luminal state, within a community of like-minded companions.

APPENDIX

Chapter Two of *Arbāb al-Ṭarīq* (Afshārī 2003a: 155-159)

Know, truthful seeker, that letting the hair grow from the ears to the shoulder is the attribute of His Excellency, God's peace and greetings upon him. More than this is forbidden. Shaving is also the custom (*sun-nat*) but only for the experienced (*muntahā*) not the novice (*mubtadā*). This is because letting the hair grow is the method and the choice of the *Abdāliyya* who have drowned in the illustrious ocean and have been slashed (*mustahlak*) by the razor blade of majesty of the divine unity (*tīgh-i jalāl-i aḥadiyyat*), and it is not for those who in the ranks of *they are like cattle* (7. 179) [who] are busy with [drinking] the water and [grazing on] the pasture of this world, and despite of this habit they speak the discourses and the circumstances of shaykh-hood, and talk of being a dervish. They are among the liars, and the noble verse *they are even more misguided* (7. 179) will be their attribute. In other words, letting the hair grow is good for the person who is not aware of his own hair.

*Whoever is aware [even] a little bit (sar-i mū) is not Majnūn.⁴⁹
If he takes pleasure in all the chains, then he makes a false claim.*

Know that among the stations of this group (*ṭāʾīfa*), there is a station that is called the station of the *abdāl*, which is the station of enrapture and [divine] insanity (*maqām-i jadhb wa junūn*). One must know how many people are within this station, and what is the [mystical] state (*ḥāl*) of each person: the enraptured engaged in wayfaring (*majdhūb-i sālik*)⁵⁰ or the wayfarer-enraptured (*sālik-i majdhūb*), or the enraptured who is not wayfaring (*majdhūb-i ghayr-i sālik*).

The enraptured engaged in wayfaring is the person that the Truth most Glorious and High calls to Himself. The Sultan commands the rapture, which alights in the throne of the servant's heart, and [the servant] spends some time in that situation. Since he has been completely

⁴⁹ Majnūn is the devoted "madman" who was besotted with Layla. Madmen were often placed in chains, which in poetry were symbolic of the strands of hair.

⁵⁰ Karamustafa (2007: 150) argues that the concept of the enraptured individual appears to have emerged in Sufi thought and practice from the 11th century onwards.

released from the affairs of the world, he steps out in the path of wayfaring, which is an expression for the knowledge of commanding [the good] and forbidding [the evil]. Then it is permissible for the enraptured engaged in wayfaring to let the hair grow because he has no free will, until he comes in the service of an eminent spiritual guide who guides him on the path of wayfaring. Having head-hair is forbidden for him when he is engaged in wayfaring, and [so he] shaves the head because the commentators on the method of wayfaring have offered guidance for the seekers on [the basis of] the contents of this glorious verse: *God has fulfilled His Prophet's vision in truth. You shall enter the sacred mosque, if God wishes, in security, your heads shaved and your hair cut short, without fear* (48.27). And so it is necessary for the *ḥājīs* to shave their heads after [the rituals] of running between *Ṣafā* and *Marwa*.⁵¹ It is necessary for such a wayfarer to pay attention when encountering a *pīr*, for he is like the Ka'ba.⁵²

*A body in pain discovered a soul in your alley;
The forsaken heart discovered the eternal treasure.*

The wayfarer-enraptured is the person who was engaged in wayfaring from the beginning until the time that the raptures of the divine dominate him as a result of much ascetic discipline and worship. And the soldiers (*shahna*) of love seized the collar of his soul and dragged it off in the alleys and markets, as Mawlawī has said:

*Whoever is our friend involves himself in ignominy.
Whoever associates with an ignominious person becomes like him in the end.*

The growing of the hair of the wayfarer in this station comes about involuntarily. And the enraptured who is not wayfaring is he who is in the level of love from the beginning to the end, and [in] this level is the attribute of majesty (*ṣifat-i jalāl*) because he could burn the world with a glance or turn it into a flower garden. Such actions are not the result of his free-will. [Such a person] has the attribute of entangled hair and it is the sign of love that casts a shadow upon his head.

*The entangled hair on my head is worthless,
It is the shadow of the wealth of love that I possess.*

⁵¹ These are the two hills that are situated on the course of the pilgrimage around Mecca, between which pilgrims traverse in the course of the ritual performance.

⁵² In other words, just as the *ḥajj* makes the Ka'ba the object of his pilgrimage, so should the Qalandar pay particular attention to the *pīr*, making him the object of such concentrated attention.

But there is also the wayfarer who is not enraptured, [and such individuals] include ascetics, worshippers and the pious. Abandoning the way of the practice of His Excellency is a major sin for this group, which is the intention of commanding the good and forbidding the evil. Therefore, their way is by praying more than the five [prescribed] times for prayer. Examples include prayers repeated at night and the prayers recited with *tasbīh* beads and others, which they have considered obligatory. So renouncing one of these acts will be a major sin for this group, and growing the hair is not a command according to this group. So, it has become clear that growing the hair is specific for the lovers and the gnostics and is not suitable for the ascetics and worshippers.

Oh dervish! Know that there are two kinds of attraction: of fire (*nārī*) and of light (*nūrī*). [Attraction] by fire is a burner of the soul, and [attraction] by light is an illuminator of faith. One must flee from the individual enraptured in fire, and one must mingle with the individual enraptured in light, because distress is increased through fire [but] gnosis is yielded through light. So, it is clear that the intention of [rapture] through light is the enraptured-wayfarer, and [the intention of rapture] through fire is the enraptured who is not a wayfarer.

Oh dervish! Know that there are two kinds of enrapture through fire; majestic (*jalālī*) and essential (*dhātī*). If [enrapture] through fire is majestic, then the [enrapture] is through love (*ishqī*). Its sign is that whenever the lover becomes absorbed (*maghrūq*) in conceiving or imagining the beloved, it is such a fashion that he fancies that any voice or call that comes to anyone in the world from the beloved (*maḥbūb*) is for his sake. They have said that Majnūn was following Layla's camel. Layla had a dog called Ram. She called the dog to her, using that name, but Majnūn imagined that she called him "Ram". In other words, he stood [to attention] in his place, and stayed there for a while. He spoke about Layla's eyes to the fawns of the meadows. The purpose of his standing to attention was [to manifest] his resolution.

Oh dervish! If you boast about being an *abdāl*, you must fasten the belt of constancy through worship, and you must not turn the head of obedience from the essential, required commanding the good and [you must] be God-wary of the prohibitions that have been forgotten. And if you are in such a way [that is, an *abdāl*, then] the Truth—Glorious and Most High – is a lover of you just as Layla was a lover of Majnūn.

Now listen to the description of the essential [attraction] by fire. Know that Iblis was created through essential fire and his task is to deceive the seekers in the first stage of seeking through [his] perverse whispering. For example, wonderful colours and strange forms appear

in their sight, like oceans of fire, or like flourishing and abundant gardens, the form of a gathering of shaykhs, and delivering good news to them from the unseen world. When [the seekers] see these colours, corrupt desires take shape in them, and they speak of unveiling and inspiration, and they suppose that it is a sign of attraction and intoxication. This station is the station of satans. Oh dervish! It is necessary to avoid [the individuals] of that group who divulge things about these stations in order not to become influenced by their filth.

*Sit seldom with the evil, for the wrong associate
Will defile you [even] if you are pure.
Despite its immensity, the sun
Is made to vanish behind a speck of a cloud.*

Know, oh truthful seeker, [that] just as there are two kinds of [enrapture] by fire, there are also two kinds [of enrapture] by light: the light of majesty and the light of beauty. Love appears from the light of majesty, and manifestations of perfect vision come from the light of beauty. And the light of majesty causes spiritual endeavour, spiritual disputation, enthusiasm and tasting to appear, while the light of beauty makes spiritual witnessing, intimacy, stability and proximity appear. The station of love belongs to the person who is manifested in the light of majesty, while the rank of gnosis belongs to whoever is manifested in the light of beauty. Know that the people of poverty are clad in both of these attributes, both the lover and beloved.

In addition, it should not be concealed that the difference between the light of beauty and the light of majesty is that the light of majesty is metaphorical while the light of beauty is real.

O dervish! [If] in this path a tiny speck is a veil—[so consider] the head-hair! This path is thinner than a hair and service to the *pīr* in the proper fashion is sharper than a sword.

Know, oh truthful seeker, that a head-hair has been considered worthy for three *abdāls*: His Excellency Shāh Naqshband,⁵³ Sayyid Burhān al-Dīn Qalandar⁵⁴ and Pādshāh Ḥusayn Qalandar.⁵⁵ At the start of seeking most of the servants have grown their hair, and they have cut it when wayfaring.

If they ask for the origin [of these beliefs associated with] head hair, answer that it is etiquette (*adab*), and the top of a head-hair is service, and the bottom of a head-hair is the hair of sincerity.

⁵³ A reference to Bahā' al-Dīn Naqshband (1318-89).

⁵⁴ The identity of this individual is unknown to me.

⁵⁵ The identity of this individual is unknown to me.

Know that the purpose of this discussion is guidance for the seekers and wayfarers of the path so that they do not step out of the prophetic *Sharīʿat* and engage in ascetic discipline:

*Etiquette is a hat of divine light,
Place it on your head and wander wherever you wish.
The Prophet said: Etiquette is a command of God, the Most High.*

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